

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04  
NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01  
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /069 W  
-----120420Z 012487 /73

P R 111115Z JAN 77  
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6515  
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
AMCONSUL BOMBAY  
AMCONSUL MADRAS  
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

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E.O. 11652:N/A  
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CE  
SUBJECT:PRESS CENSORSHIP IMPOSED AS STRIKES CONTINUE

REF: (A) COLOMBO 99, (B) COLOMBO 0111, (C) COLOMBO 0110 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. THE IMPOSITION OF PRESS CENSORSHIP IS THE ONLY MAJOR  
CHANGE  
IN THE SITUATION REPORTED REF A. BUS SERVICE IS LIMITED AND RAIL  
SERVICE  
IS NON-EXISTENT IN COLOMBO AND VERY MINIMAL ELSEWHERE. THE PRIVATE  
SECTOR, SO FAR UNAFFECTED, IS THREATENED BY JANUARY 12 STRIKE  
CALL BY  
TROTSKYITE UNIONS. POLITICAL LEADERS OF ALL PARTIES ARE PRUDENTLY  
SILENT. END SUMMARY.

2. THE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALLY IMPOSED PRESS CENSORSHIP FOR STRIKE-  
RELATED NEWS JANUARY 10 (SEE REF B), STOPPING FLOW OF PRO-  
STRIKE NEWS FROM COMMUNIST AND TROTSKYITE PAPERS.

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3. THE STRIKE SITUATION REMAINS GENERALLY AS REPORTED REFTTEL.EVEN  
FEWER BUSES APPEAR TO BE RUNNING TODAY (JANUARY 11) BUT LIMITED  
SERVICE IS BEING MAINTAINED WITH NON-STRIKING SRI LANKA FREEDOM  
PARTY (SLFP) WORKERS. THERE HAVE BEEN SOME TRAINS RUN OUTSIDE  
COLOMBO (THE GOVERNMENT REPORTED TWENTY-ONE YESTERDAY) BUT THERE  
IS NO PRETENCE OF ANYTHING APPROACHING NORMAL SERVICE (APPROXIMATELY  
730 TRAINS DAILY NATIONWIDE) AND COLOMBO STATIONS REMAIN DESERTED.

MOST GOVERNMENT CLERICAL AND MINOR EMPLOYEES REMAIN OFF THE JOB.

4. PRIVATE SECTOR COMPANIES REMAIN RELATIVELY UNAFFECTED BUT THEY TOO MAY BE DRAWN IN. THE TROTSKYITE LANKA SAMAJA PARTY (LSSP)- AFFILIATED CEYLON FEDERATION OF LABOR (CFL) IS DUE TO STRIKE JANUARY 12; THEY ARE HEAVILY REPRESENTED IN PRIVATE COMPANIES AND GOVERNMENT CORPORATIONS. THE CEYLON PETROLEUM CORPORATION IS ONE ORGANIZATION LIKELY TO BE INCLUDED IN THE CFL STRIKE; PETROL AND KEROSENE DISTRIBUTION , ALREADY LIMITED OUTSIDE COLOMBO, WILL BE FURTHER AFFECTED ALTHOUGH THE SLFP-AFFILIATED UNION SHOULD REMAIN ON THE JOB.

5. IMPORTANT UNIONS STILL ON THE JOB-BESIDES SLFP-AFFILIATED ONES- INCLUDE THE WHITE-COLLAR CEYLON MERCANTILE UNION (CMU),AN INDEPENDENT TROTSKYITE UNION WHICH CAN TIE UP THE COLOMBOCOMMERCIAL SECTOR IF LEADER BALA TAMPOE IS SO INCLUDED, THE CEYLON WORKERS CONGRESS (CWC), WHICH DOMINATES THE TEA PLANTATIONS, THE CEYLON BANK EMPLOYEES UNION, AND ALL THE DOCK WORKERS, WHO HAVE REJECTED THE BLANDISHMENTS OF LSSP LABOR LEADERS. THE CMU GENERAL COUNCIL WILL MEET JANUARY 11 TO DISCUSS WHAT TO DO. THE CWC IS STILL STAYING CLEAR OF THE STRIKE.

6. PROMINENT POLITICAL LEADERS HAVE BEEN UNCHARACTERISTICALLY SILENT AS THE STRIKES HAVE SPREAD. PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE HAS NOT BEEN HEARD FROM PUBLICLY SINCE HER DECEMBER 29 SPEECH (76 COLOMBO 4735 NOTAL) URGING THE RAIL WORKERS TO RETURN TO WORK. PIETER KEUNEMAN, THE COMMUNIST PARTY (CP) LEADER AND MINISTER OF HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION, HAS NOT TAKEN A POSITION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ON THE STRIKE; THE HARD-LINE WING OF THE CP, LED BY DR. S.A. WICKREMASINGHE IS EQUALLY SILENT ALTHOUGH THAT GROUP HAS NEVER BEEN COMFORTABLE IN THE GOVERNMENT AND IS FULLY BACKING THE STRIKE. LSSP POLITICAL LEADERS, USUALLY THE OUTSPOKEN CHAMPIONS OF THE WORKING CLASS, HAVE LEFT THE PUBLIC RHETORIC TO THEIR LABOR AUXILIARIES, PERHAPS TO AVOID LENDING CREDENCE TO THE GOVERNMENT CRITICISM THAT THE STRIKE IS AN LSSP CONSPIRACY. UNITED NATIONAL PARTY LEADERS ARE ALSO QUIET, REFLECTING THEIR LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR THE STRIKE, WHICH THEY NOMINALLY SUPPORT.

7. THE NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY HAS BEEN ON A MONTH'S VACATION, FOLLOWING A LONG AND FATIGUING BUDGET SESSION. THE NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY 20 ALTHOUGH IT COULD PRESUMABLY BE POSTPONED IF THE PRIME MINISTER DOES NOT WANT TO FACE A PUBLIC DEBATE ON THE STRIKE AND HER GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE.

8. COMMENT: PRESS CENSORSHIP, GAS STATION QUEUES, A SCARCITY OF BREAD AND FLOUR, TRANSPORT PROBLEMS, AND THE SEMI-PARALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS ADD UP TO WHAT COULD BE A CHAOTIC

SITUATION. LIFE IN COLOMBO, HOWEVER, IS OFTEN DISRUPTED IN ONE WAY OR THE OTHER AND THE PRESENT COMBINATION OF PROBLEMS HAS NOT OVERWHELMED CITY RESIDENTS. THERE ARE AN INORDINATE NUMBER OF POLICE AND ARMY MEN STATIONED AT STRATEGIC LOCATIONS AROUND THE CITY. OTHERWISE, TO OUTWARD APPEARANCES, COLOMBO IS NEAR-NORMAL. THOSE NOT ON STRIKE ARE MANAGING TO GET TO WORK, SHOPS ARE OPEN, AND THERE HAS BEEN NO VIOLENCE. WHILE THE SITUATION MAY FURTHER DETERIORATE, THE CURRENT MINIMAL LEVEL OF SERVICES COULD BE TOLERATED FOR SOME TIME. A FEW CYNICS HAVE

SUGGESTED THAT THE ABSENCE OF LARGE NUMBERS OF GOVERNMENT WHITE COLLAR WORKERS MAY WELL IMPROVE OVERALL PRODUCTIVITY. AN ADDED OPTION OPEN TO THE PRIME MINISTER MAY THUS BE SIMPLY TO WAIT OUT THE STRIKERS UNTIL THEY HAVE TO RETURN FOR FINANCIAL REASONS. END COMMENT.  
REED

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